

Butterflies in Cyprus, June 1973

By R. F. BRETHERTON, C.B., M.A., F.R.E.S.

My wife and I, with a non-entomological friend, spent a fortnight in Cyprus from 11th to 25th June 1973. The lepidoptera of Cyprus are fairly well known: Rebel's list of 1939 contains 59 species of Rhopalocera, ten of which have not been reported in the present century, and over 400 Heterocera, to which Wiltshire added over 50 in 1948 and 1949. I had already well sampled the butterflies during a week at Kyrenia in mid-May 1954; but I hoped to see this time some of the species for which that visit had been too early.

We flew comfortably from Heathrow to Nicosia by Cyprus Airways, picked up a previously hired car on our arrival at the airport in the late afternoon, and stayed the first night in the air-conditioned Ledra Palace Hotel just outside the walls of the old city. Its comfort was welcome, as the temperature was over 80 deg. F., though tempered by a stiff breeze. On the next morning, while returning from a visit to the Turkish quarter and its famous mosque, I noticed an unfamiliar little Blue flying beside the over-grown moat near the Paphos Gate, and I was able in half-an hour to take a good series of *Chilades galba* Lederer, a new species to me. Despite muttering thunder and a few spots of rain the males were flying freely to the blossoms of *Solanum dulcimara* (Woody Nightshade), and some of the more elusive females were seen to oviposit on a spiny, yellowish flowered vetch (probably *Anthyllis* sp.) which was growing among it. We saw this plant, without the *Solanum*, in a few other places in the plains later, but did not find the butterfly elsewhere.

From Nicosia we drove in the middle of the day by a circuitous route to the north coast and so to a comfortable small hotel at Bella Pais, about 1,500 feet up above Kyrenia, where we had booked for six nights. Both the coast and the limestone Kyrenia Mountains were already very desiccated, and the butterflies were scarce and mostly in poor condition. This was in striking contrast to my experience in the same area in mid-May 1954, when butterflies were abundant and most species were fresh. The difference may have been partly due to unusual weather: we were told that there had been little rain or snow during the winter, and all Cyprus was suffering from acute shortage of water. However, a few fresh *Gonepteryx cleopatra* Stmgr. and *Pontia daplidice* L. were seen among the gardens of the attractive village of Bella Pais (of "Bitter Lemons" fame), and two short visits to the Aghirda Pass produced a few fair specimens of *Hipparchia syriaca cypriaca* Riley, which were sheltering from the heat in the dried-up nullah or playing hide and seek round the olive trees; a single *Carcharodus alceae* Esp. was also seen there. The most interesting capture of the week was a large blackish Skipper caught in a dry water-course near our bathing place on the

Pachyammos Sands, east of Kyrenia. This turned out to be *Erionota thrax* L. (*mathias* Bdv.), a tropical and eastern species which, like *C. galba*, reaches its north western limits in Cyprus and Egypt. Another example was missed in the same place, but we did not find it elsewhere. A long expedition on 16th June across the mountains and the Mesoaria plain to Salamis and Famagusta proved disappointing: in the relatively well-watered area round Kythrea we saw only *P. daplidice* and other common species, the plain was wholly bare, and we were prevented by cloud and a thunder storm from investigating some promising ground in the eastern pass over the Kyrenia Mountains, where Dr De Worms did very well some years ago.

On 18th June we moved by a very hot drive westwards along the coast and then across the plain to Platres, where we stayed for six nights at the Hotel Pendeli. This is a delightful village about 4,000 feet up on the north side of the central Troodos Mountains. In July and August it is usually full of visitors seeking relief from the heat of Nicosia, but in mid-June the season had hardly begun and the villagers were fully engaged in picking an enormous crop of black cherries, mostly destined for the London market. The Troodos are much higher than the Kyrenia Mountains, and have larger reserves of water; moreover, since they are composed of igneous rock instead of limestone, there are occasional streams and surface dampness. Even so, however, one had to work hard to find butterflies in any number, and the forests of Aleppo and Troodos Pine (*Pinus halepensis* and *Pinus nigra*) which cover the higher slopes were almost empty of them.

The gardens and orchards of Platres village produced a fair number of *G. cleopatra*, *Celastrina argiolus* L. and a few *Lampides boeticus* L., and at night the hotel lights were productive, mainly of small Geometers and Pyrales, but with some bigger game: it was interesting to see the local British "Waves" *Idaea vulpinaria* H-S and *I. degeneraria* Hb. sitting along side a magnificent east Mediterranean Hawk moth, *Chaerocampa alecto cretica* R. & J. Above the village, towards the Caledonia Falls, I caught a male, and later a splendid female, of *Pseudochazara anthelea acamanthis* Rebel. The female—large, brick-red in colour, and with heavy spotting on the forewings—puzzled me as to its identity. I was familiar with *P. anthelea amalthea* in Crete and mainland Greece, where the females are, like the males, black and white; but in Asia the white is replaced by brown, and in Cyprus the endemic form is still brighter in colour and more heavily spotted, a very striking insect. One or two more males were seen, but unfortunately no more females. A visit to a shady stream-bed rather lower down at Kato Platres gave a series of fresh and finely marked *Pararge egeria* L., also reddish brown, several *Limenitis reducta* Stdgr., a few of the endemic Blue *Glaucopsyche paphos* Turner, and a sight of our only *Papilio machaon* L.

Further afield, a walk to the top of Mount Olympus, (6,401 feet) was disappointing: the only things seen were a few of the Cyprus Grayling, *Hipparchia pellucida* Frhst., and *Maniola cypricola* Graves on the approaches, and a mixed colony of *Lasiommata megera lyssa* Hb. and *L. maera orientalis* Stdgr. and a couple of *Euchloe ausonia* Hb. flying wildly round the bare summit. Our most successful expedition was along the mountain roads to the Kykko Monastery and on to the Cedars Valley, which contains the relics of the Cyprus cedar forests. Near the monastery we had a close-up view—but not a capture—of a splendid *Charaxes jasius* L.; and in the Valley, beside a nearly dry spring, we found our largest concourse of butterflies: *H. pellucida* and *M. cypricola* in abundance, with a few *Hyponephele lupina cypriaca* Riley and a single *Quercusia quercus longicauda* Riley drinking at the drying mud, and numbers of *L. reducta*, *G. cleopatra*, *C. argiolus* and *Aricia agestis calida* Bell. in the damp part of the forest above it. Another long drive to the south coast at Palaeopaphos and Curium was less profitable entomologically. Besides exploring these archaeological sites, we had a delicious bathe in the cove where Venus is reputed to have been born from the foam of the sea (one of our number acted the part for a photograph), but the only butterflies of interest were a single *Gegenes pumilio* Hffmsg in a dry water-course, which I stupidly missed several times, and a few *Chazara briseis larnacana* Obth. and *H. syriaca* by a stream on the way back to Platres. As on the north-coast, the low country was completely dried up.

On our last full day, 24th June, we left Platres early for Nicosia, intending to explore the eastern end of the Troodos on the way, since our guide-book described it as interesting and varied country. In fact, however, the road passed only rather unattractive mining villages in bare and desiccated hills, so we spent several hours in the middle of the day sheltering from the heat beside a stream on the lower slopes near Apliki which still contained some pools of water. There were a few butterflies here, including *H. lupina*, *H. pellucida* and *H. syriaca*, and also a small colony of the little Blue, *Chilades trochilus* Frr., sitting on bramble blossoms or drinking on the mud. Unfortunately they were mostly very worn, but I was particularly glad to catch this, the smallest European butterfly, which had eluded me in Greece. It is easily distinguished from *C. galba* by the fact that the males are brown instead of Blue.

Nicosia, which we reached about 5.30 p.m., was even hotter than before, and we did not attempt any collecting on the following morning before driving to the air-port for the return flight to London, after an extremely pleasant but entomologically rather unprofitable holiday. The list of species seen, which is appended, includes 32 species of Rhopalocera. This compares with 23 species seen by me 13th to 20th May 1951 around Kyrenia, and 22 species seen in that area by Dr de Worms between 25th April and 14th May 1967; but at these earlier dates the numbers of insects were certainly greater

and the condition of most species better. This year I was struck by the scarcity of the migratory species. *Colias crocea* Fourc. was fairly widespread but mostly seen singly, of *Vanessa atalanta* L. I saw only two, and of *V. cardui* only one worn specimen. The whole Cyprus list is, like those of most of the Mediterranean islands, relatively short; but it is of considerable interest because of its high proportion of endemic sub-species and because of its Asiatic affinities, which are much stronger than in Crete or even in Rhodes.

Lepidoptera seen in Cyprus, 11th to 25th June 1973

Papilio machaon L. Kato Platres, 3,000 ft., one fresh 22.6.

Pieris brassicae L. Kyrenia and Troodos, f.c.

P. rapae L. general but not abundant.

P. daphidice L. general both in plain and mountains: small, gen. II.

Euchloe ausonia Hb. Mt Olympus, 6,400 ft., two seen 20.6.

Colias crocea Fourc. general, mostly singly; only one *f. helice* Hb.

Gonepteryx cleopatra taurica Stdgr. Kyrenia and Troodos, f.c. and fresh near water.

Charaxes jastus L. Chakistra, 3,250 ft., one seen 23.6.

Limenitis reducta Stdgr. Kato Platres, 22.6; Cedars Valley, 23.6; Apliki, 24.6

V. atalanta L. Bella Pais, one 14.6; Palekchori, one 24.6.

V. cardui L. Kato Platres, one worn 22.6.

Hipparchia syriaca cypriaca Stdgr. Widespread and f.c. to 3,000 ft., among olive trees and in dry nullahs.

Chazara briseis larnacana Obth. Widespread to 4,000 ft., but mostly singly.

Hipparchia pellucida Frhst. Kyrenia region, worn and scarce; Troodos to 6,000 ft., common, esp. in Cedars Valley.

Pseudochazara anthelea acamanthis Rebel. Platres, 4,500 ft., two males, one female, 19.6; Troodos, 5,000 ft., one male 20.6.

Maniola cypricola Graves. Kyrenia region, worn and scarce; Troodos region, common.

Hyponephele lupina cypriaca Riley. Bella Pais, one 14.6; Cedars Valley; f.c. 23.6; Apliki, 24.6.

Pararge egeria L. Kato Platres, 22.6; Cedars Valley; 23.6; Apliki, 24.6. Common and fresh in shady stream-beds.

Lasiommata megera L. Troodos summit 20.6; Kato Platres, 22.6.

L. maera orientalis Stdgr. Bella Pais, 14.6; Troodos summit 20.6.

Kirinia roxelana Cramer. Agros, 24.6, one only.

Quercusia quercus longicauda Riley. Cedars Valley, one male 23.6.

Lycaena phloea L. Kato Platres, 22.6; Cedars Valley, 23.6; Apliki 24.6. Not common.

Lampides boeticus L. Platres 22.6, several; Apliki, one 24.6.

- Chilades trochilus* Frr. Apliki, 24.6, four caught, others seen on blossom and mud; worn.
- C. galba* Led. Nicosia, outside Paphos Gate, 12.6, an abundant colony, fresh.
- Celastrina argiolus* L. Troodos region, widespread and f.c., only males seen.
- Glaucopsyche paphos* Turner. Lapithos spring, worn female 18.6; Kato Platres, males fresh 22.6.
- Aricia agestis calida* Bell. Troodos region to 6,000 ft., fresh and common locally on the forest edges.
- Carcharodus alceae* Esp. Aghirda Pass, one seen 17.6.
- Erienota thrax* L. (*mathias* F.) near Psammotis Beach, one taken, one seen, 15.6.
- Gegenes pumilio* Hffmsg. Palaeopaphos, one missed 21.6.
- Chaerocampa alecto cretica* R. & J. Platres, one at light 21.6.
- Acronycta psi* L. Platres, one at light 20.6.
- Dysgonia algira* L. Bella Pais, one worn 13.6.
- Chlorissa pulmentaria* Gn. Platres, at light 15.6.
- Idaea vulpinaria* H-S. Platres, several at light 23.6.
- Idaea ostrinaria* Hb. Platres, several at light 23 and 24.6.
- Idaea degeneraria* Hb. Platres, 21.6.
- I. rufaria* Hb. Bella Pais, at light 18.6; Platres, many at light 21/23.6.
- Scopula marginepunctata* Goeze. Platres, two at light 20.6.
- Gymnoscelis rufofasciata tempestivata* Z. Bella Pais, abundant at light 13/17.6.
- Peribatodes perversaria correptaria* Z. Platres, at light 23.6.
- Aporodes florealis* Hb. Bella Pais, at light 17.6.
- Pyrausta aurata meridionalis* Stdgr. Widespread by day: Apliki, etc.

REFERENCES

- Bretherton, R. F. (1954). A week's butterfly collecting in Cyprus. (*Entomologist*, **87**: 207-211).
- de Worms, C. G. M. (1967). Three weeks in Cyprus, April-May 1967. (*Ent. Rec.*, **79**: 245-249).
- Rebel, H. (1939). Zur Lepidopterenfauna Cyperns. (*Mitt. Munch. Ent. Ges.*, **29**: 487-564).
- Wiltshire, E. P. (1948). Two new forms or species and 35 new records from Cyprus (*Ent. Rec.*, **60**: 79-87); (1949). Some more new records from Cyprus (*Ent. Rec.*, **61**: 73-78).

Folly Hill, Birtley Green, Bramley,
Guildford, Surrey

30.8.1973.

ACHERONTIA ATROPOS L. IN ESSEX IN 1973.—I would like to record that a specimen of the Death's-head Hawkmoth was found on a grass verge on October 1st 1973 at Upminster, Essex, by a schoolboy Kevin Harries. — R. R. Cook, Donna, Blackmore Road, Hookend, near Brentwood, Essex.